

Lake Erie algal blooms prove toxic for tourism: editorial



Harmful algal blooms are toxic to Lake Erie vacationers. (Susan Glaser, *The Plain Dealer*)



By Editorial Board

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The long-term damage that harmful algal blooms will do to Lake Erie transcends the public health threat to drinking water.

What's really at stake is the [reputation of a vacation destination](#) that generated \$12.9 billion in visitor spending in 2014, floated 119,591 jobs and contributed \$1.7 billion in federal, state and local taxes, according to Tourism Economics, an industry consulting firm.

The scientific commitment and taxpayer investment over the past four decades to restore the health and the lure of the Walleye Capital of the World -- a recreational island-and-shore smorgasbord of boating, biking, fishing and swimming -- stand in danger of being eclipsed by these annual phosphorus-fueled, fluorescent-green scum puddles.

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That cannot be allowed to happen.

The damage *Microcystis* cyanobacteria do to the public perception of Lake Erie cannot be rectified as easily as the toxins they release in water treatment plants.

"That's very solvable," said Rick Stumpf, lead algal bloom forecaster for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In the wake of the August 2014 environmental disaster that left nearly 500,000 residents of Toledo and the western basin without safe drinking water for three days, the city's Collins Park water treatment plant upgraded its filtration system and its ability to detect algal toxins.

There has been no similar occurrence so far this year – even though the 2015 bloom has hit 8.7 on a 10-point scale, Stumpf said.

The impact is being felt, though, by the charter boat business. Paul Pacholski, head of the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association, told Plain Dealer travel editor Susan Glaser that he estimated his fishing business was down 25 percent this year due to the toxic slime.

One of the main sources of that slime is agricultural runoff, said Adam Rissien, director of agricultural and water policy at the Ohio Environmental Council. That is why he and other stakeholders have requested that the state clarify the rules Senate Bill 1 -- signed into law last April -- now offers for applying fertilizer, and the consequences faced by violators.

The threat to public health and the multibillion-dollar annual tourism industry underscores the urgency of reducing nutrient runoff and combined sewer overflows. On Thursday, Oct. 8, the charter boat association will host a forum in Port Clinton on the economic damage these blooms inflict on small businesses.

Gov. John Kasich ought to attend. After all, the economic well-being of Ohio is threatened.